



Parishes and Government Review Panel

Public Hearing

Witness: Chair, Comité des Connétables

Wednesday, 4th February 2026

Panel:

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Chair)

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central (Vice-Chair)

Connétable R. Honeycombe of St. Ouen

Witness:

Connétable M.K. Jackson of St. Brelade - Chair, Comité des Connétables

[13:00]

Deputy H.M. Miles of St. Brelade (Chair):

Thank you. Welcome to the public hearing of the Parishes and Government Scrutiny Panel. This is a hearing to discuss the relationship between the parishes and the Government, and today this hearing is being streamed live and a transcript will be placed on the States Assembly website in due course. I just remind people please to turn off their mobile phones and any other devices. So, just by way of introduction, I am Deputy Helen Miles. I am Chair of the panel.

Deputy C.D. Curtis of St. Helier Central:

I am Deputy Catherine Curtis, the Vice-Chair of the panel.

Connétable R. Honeycombe of St. Ouen:

Richard Honeycombe, Connétable of St. Ouen.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Mike Jackson, Connétable of St. Brelade and Chair of the Comité des Connétables.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Just to confirm that you are here in your capacity as Chair of the Comité des Connétables today.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Indeed.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay, thank you. We have one hour set aside for the hearing today. If it runs over, maybe you have a spare 5 or 10 minutes being that the States finished yesterday. That is why we are squashing it in. First of all, I would just like to say we have received the submission, a very detailed submission, and we have some questions about the submission but also just about other general areas as well. Thank you. So, I am going to start off. This is an appreciative inquiry. We have said that all along. What we want to produce from this report is an evidence base of where we are and where the relationship between the parishes and the Government is at 2025 so that decisions that are made that might affect the parish in future times are actually based on some evidence. So it is specifically about the relationship between the parishes and the Government. It is not an inspection of the parish; it never has been. I think there has been some confusion over that. So, really, the first question is about the relationship with the Government. How do you describe the current working relationship between the parishes and the Government?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I do not believe we have any difficulties. Truthfully, as you will be aware, several of us wear different hats, if you like, in that some Connétables will have a Ministerial role, others will have an Assistant Ministerial role, and that is helpful to a large extent in terms of communications and networking to ensure that we are all singing from the same hymn sheet, which I think is important. I am not aware of any difficulties.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. So how does the Government engage with the parishes then in general?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

If there are any particular projects being considered by Government we will be consulted through the Comité office and generally that will have the effect of each Connétable having the ability, shall we say, to have input into whatever is being consulted upon. I think the Government departments will follow the usual consultation process, so I think we have adequate input in that way. Likewise,

for those involved directly with particular departments, they will have a stronger input and inform officers in that particular department what might work or what might not.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

When it works the other way round, so if the Comité have a particular area of interest or an area of discussion, how does the Comité engage with Government?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Once again by direct communication with the particular department we may be aware that is dealing with that particular situation or whether it be the Law Officers, the Law Drafting Department. So we have access to really the same individuals as Government and in terms of officer specialisation we will not be afraid to ask and we will get a polite response, I am sure, in most cases.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Just hearing you say about consultation from Government to the parishes working well generally, but that made me think about the alcohol licensing. Do you think it works well in that case?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, there are different ways of looking at that and, in fact, the alcohol licensing proposition was put forward by the Minister. He did a lot of consultation. We put in - the Comité put in - an amendment on the basis of that consultation which had been received and we fully agreed with what was being proposed in terms of the reduction of the licence categories, if you like. We have no difference with that. What we did differ with was the administration side of it. That is not really an area that particularly interested the hospitality industry. We have met with them subsequently and they are just keen to get the whole process simplified and possibly made cheaper, and that is what we are working towards at the moment.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Did you feel that the parishes were listened to properly in that case?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I do not think they were listened to by the hospitality industry, who probably did not understand that we were in full agreement with what the Minister was proposing in terms of making the system simpler. The proposals coming through were that the parishes would provide a one-stop shop and just make the whole process of applying for a licence simpler. Notwithstanding that, there is a level to be retained in terms of dealing with managers, which we deal with anyway, and the argument coming from principally the Parish of St. Helier, who deal with the lion's share of licence applications, was that they do all the work anyway and a little bit more would not have proved too difficult. I do

anticipate that there is another amendment coming down the line, which might suggest that the administration remains broadly as it is in that the licensing bench, as we note at the moment, will remain. So we will have to keep our eyes open for that and I suspect the Comité or the Constables generally would agree with that focus. If it is simpler for the applicants I think it has to be the right way to go.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay, thank you. Are there any opportunities for the parishes and the Government to work even more closely or more efficiently together?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Possibly in terms of road administration. I might talk out of turn with other Constables. We all have road systems in our parishes. We have our by-roads. Likewise in St. Helier, they have parish-administered roads and public roads. Quite frankly, I think for the general public it is quite confusing. They have evolved over years. It is almost easier in the country parishes because in, I think, the 1930s it was decided that it was unfair for parishes to take responsibility for the main roads which visitors would use in going to the beaches. So at that time it was decided to split them off. I do not know if it is terribly sensible in this day and age, but we have the situation where we are seeing at the moment roads are dug up for all sorts of things and from my personal point of view in St. Brelade we have issues - and other Constables have the same thing - where parish roads get dug up and the integrity of the roads is very often wrecked when that takes place. There is a constant battle with utility companies and that can be the same for Government. That area needs good management. It is going in the right direction by virtue of the fact that there is a traffic works system, which we all subscribe to, and that has the effect of letting everybody know what is going on and when. There was a comment in the last States sitting on Tuesday where the Constable of Trinity particularly was remarking on the fact that due to the major roadworks going on in terms of drainage, his parish roads were getting unreasonably damaged and what was the Minister going to do about it. So there is quite a lot of crossover there.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. As Chair of the Comité des Connétables you sit as an ex officio member of the Council of Ministers.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I do.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. So that is a case of attending the meetings, being able to contribute to debates but not having a vote?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, it depends on the nature of the vote because in my particular situation I am an Assistant Minister for the Environment, so that will give me a vote if that is the parameters of that particular discussion.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I wanted to just ask some questions now about the Comité. So as Chair, how would you describe the way the Comité des Connétables operates?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, we have a monthly - broadly monthly - meeting in alternative parish halls. The 12 Constables will attend. The Comité secretaries will attend. Those meetings will be minuted. There will be publicly available minutes. The minutes for the areas where there may be policy under discussion will be confidential. We invite the public to the public bits, if you like, if I can call them that, and the policy under development areas will be confidential and maybe come out in subsequent months if agreement is achieved on whatever subject. So the meetings generally run from 9.00 to 1.00 or thereabouts, so it is the whole morning. We invite parties to present to us and it goes back to the consultation discussion earlier. Those who wish to consult with the Comité will be invited to make a presentation, which regularly occurs. On the other hand, we may invite Government officers or Ministers to present to us if there are areas which we wish to expand on or wish them to expand on further. So it is a busy morning. The agenda is drawn up the previous week and circulated, so we all contribute in our various ways. I have to say I am grateful to other Constables for their contributions during those meetings.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

The minutes, are they published or the part A is published?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes, the part A is published and available on the Comité website.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. We read the submission and saw there was quite a bit about training. What arrangements are in place for the induction and training of newly elected Connétables?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

It has, I would say, probably in the past been relatively ad hoc in that we have ... there are 2 elements to it. One is the States element, and obviously you will be aware the Greffe put together a training programme, if we can call it that. From the Comité point of view, there will be an induction meeting. I think those who, shall we say, remain from a previous term are always happy to impart their knowledge to people who are new on the block. This worked in the past and I hope that if we can contribute to what the Greffe do I think anybody is more than happy to do that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do they get the usual training like safeguarding, data protection, all these sort of things?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Certainly in terms of data protection, the Comité office is strong on that, and each parish does its own training from a data protection point of view.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So the Connétables would get that?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Each parish will do its own data protection training and the Constables generally retain a data protection officer with whom we can consult should we wish.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Do you think that is sufficient, then?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

It seems to have worked so far.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. The Comité emphasises the importance of independence from Government funding, but are there any circumstances in which closer alignment or shared support with Government would be acceptable, do you think?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, I think we have to consider the funding of the parishes. It is not so much the funding of the Comité because the Comité is funded by the parishes, and they in turn are funded by the ratepayer. So anything we do will have a consequence on the ratepayer and our finances are very open and democratic, if you like, when it comes to rates assessment assemblies. Government is different and I suppose one could argue that Government has expanded exponentially over recent years. We have seen the expansion of headcount, whereas the parishes have stayed much the same in terms of headcount. I think most Constables are quite keen to keep it like that and keep costs under control and the way it is done at the moment is quite a good way of doing it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Is that valuing of independence, that is also like in the play parks there were some which were supported by Government, which has been withdrawn, that financial support, so do you think there might be more need for some financial ...?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think I could say it in a different way. I think most parishes would gratefully receive additional funding. If it is perhaps a Government desire to implement a particular project, I think we would expect some Government input. If it might be a new Government project or directive, it would only be reasonable that they would contribute towards it. In terms of play parks, it is a shame that while the Government will expound about the support for play parks, unless there is cash there it is not really worth the paper it is written on.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Yes. Okay. So perhaps for particular projects then, yes.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Indeed.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Thank you. Now I have some questions about perhaps the strengths and the future direction of the Comité. So I was going to ask what aspects of the Comité's work function particularly well, but I think you have mentioned really some of that already with all the Connétables coming together.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

We do, yes, and any matters of, well, discussion are raised. Any Constable can raise anything at a Comité meeting under any other business should they so wish, and they do. They can be discussed and taken forward with the agreement of others should they so wish.

[13:15]

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Are there any areas where you feel the Comité could develop or enhance its role?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think we are always open to suggestions and maybe that could be led by technology as time goes on. There have been discussions over voting only this morning with a journalist I had asking could we develop easier ways for parishioners to vote at parish assemblies. My comment then was, well, I think we would need to follow technology, the technological lead from Government, and I think it is fair to say the Greffe are seeking a solution to that in some shape or form. So I think we have to be patient. Yes, we would all like for people to be able to vote at parish assemblies remotely, but in terms of security we have not arrived at that yet. I am sure we will before too long.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay, so there is that interaction with Government there. Then the Comité's role would be to help the different parishes take ...?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes, indeed. We have to look after our own parishes and, of course, when we get to elections there is a lot of crossover and input from the parishes, who have the experience of running elections. We have seen quite a lot of change in the past 2 or 3 terms over the election process, some for the good and some not so good, in my view, but it is a process which evolves. We continue to contribute to ensure the best outcome for the voting electorate.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Are there any activities that the Comité currently undertakes which you feel may not sit naturally within its remit, things that have just sort of ended up being the Comité's role?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think most Constables are willing to contribute to the general operation of the Island, if I can call it that. While there are some elements which may stray outside its remit, I do not think its remit is particularly defined as such. So I think most parishes, because they are dealing with all-Island issues, will have to consider a degree of overlap, except when it comes to spending money, where we will probably tend to resist. **[Laughter]**

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. In your submission you describe variation between parishes as a strength rather than a weakness. Are there any areas where you think greater consistency would improve outcomes for parishioners?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think where there is a potential for better outcomes, yes, we certainly would. Of course, this takes place in certain areas such as driving licences, dog licences and so forth, where we all use the same system. In fact, the rates system broadly uses the rates system but it can be interpreted with slight variations in parishes. When you analyse it down the variations are not great and it will be down to the rate assessors of the day and how they deal with that within the guidelines provided. As I mentioned, dogs have a central system, a recent system called "Poodl", which deals with that side, and the police have access to that. So I think where we can use common systems we do. We will continue to do so and once again technology will enable us to do that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

My last question for now: if you did have one Connétable out of everyone just not agreeing to do what everyone else wanted, is there anything you can do about that on the Comité?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Not really. There will be always an agreement to differ in certain situations. I have to say we tend to make decisions based on consensus and we do not really have, in my experience, too much in the way of battles at the Comité table. I think maybe because Connétables tend to be of a certain demographic with a certain amount of life experience under their belts, they are quite well equipped to come to compromises and we certainly do. Some Connétables will have, shall we say, knowledge and specialities in certain areas and I think the rest of us are very keen to take that on board and learn from that and make decisions based on their experience as much as anything else.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Thank you.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Do you have a quorum at the Comité?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

No.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

No quorum, so decisions could be made with maybe just one or 2 of you there?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Rare. I do not recall that ever happening, quite frankly.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you. One of the things that has been raised is about whether the Comité des Connétables should be a statutory body with clearly defined rules and responsibilities. Certainly, in your submission you have stated that it already is a statutory body. I think we have observed a distinction between a body established in statute and a body that is assigned functions by statute. We were just wondering how you understand that particular distinction.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think it is fair to say in looking at the records, if you like, it is a bit woolly but I think there is a presumption that it is, in effect, a statutory body. I say "in effect" quite guardedly, in fact, because that is almost what it says. The advice from a previous Greffier pretty well said that, going back. I ask myself, having read this, what difference does it make? I am not sure that it does make any difference at all. The reality is we probably do not want to be a statutory body of the States because then it would be for the States to actually dictate what we do. So in a way the present situation is probably the best way to deal with it.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

So is that kind of making the play for very independent, so as Connétable you are independent to your particular parish?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, yes, I think we are and I think it is fair to say that we guard that privilege quite jealously. It is important. Jersey has this parish system which has worked for years and I am of the view that if it ain't broke why fix it. We have not discussed the question of the statutory nature of the Comité among ourselves. We may do so and it will be interesting to see what others think, but at the moment personally I do not think it is an issue that is causing concern.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Your submission is quite clear the Comité is a statutory body and the submission cites that it has been set up by law, but it actually cites the Standing Orders of the States of Jersey, which of course are not statutes, they are rules. Also, whereas the States of Jersey Law sets up the Council of Ministers as a statutory body, if you like, the Comité des Connétables are absent in any of this. The reason that we asked the question is that as a body the Comité are able to bring forward legislation,

effectively develop policy, undertake consultation, et cetera. I think the question is really rooted in whether a statutory nature of the body would make that more legitimate.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

It is a point that could be argued. I am not a legislative drafter in those terms. I think it could merit further discussion. I think that is probably the simple answer to that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you. In terms of further discussion as well, one of the questions that we asked was about this role of parish assemblies, in particular around the report that was prepared by the Law Commission - I think it was prepared by Advocate Pallot - which recommended quite a lot of changes to the parish assembly, such as virtual attendance and voting and the like. But nothing seems to have happened since that report was published and we were just wondering what the Comité's views are on the recommendations in that report.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think the recommendations came out of meetings with Advocate Pallot and the Comité so we are supportive of what is being proposed. In terms of the development of those to fruition, of course, remote voting is challenging. As I suggested earlier, we tried it during the COVID period. It is expensive at the moment. It is expensive in one way, in terms of actually broadcasting the meetings and, secondly, the security element of the voting is not quite there yet. I think the Greffe will tell you that while they are working hard on it, we are not there. Obviously with coming up to elections there is quite a lot of enthusiasm for that. So my feel is that once the Greffe establish a secure route, I suspect the parishes will follow soon after. I think it would be helpful.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I think again it is this ... not conflict, I suppose it is a tension between the Greffe are doing stuff to provide for Government and citizens, where the parishes are very clearly independent and very rightly proud and protective of your own parish assembly system. So what are the realistic next steps for the parishes or are you simply waiting for the Greffe to produce a solution?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think, given that we have a very limited resource - I have 3 part-timers at the Comité office - I think we have to sensibly wait for the Greffe to come up with a solution. We are involved with the automatic voter registration programme, so we are in constant discussion, if you like, over that. So I think we will be apprised, if you like, once we are in a position to advance that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

What we are guessing at is will the Comité try and bring forward the recommendations and the changes to legislation that were recommended in the parish assemblies report?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think certain of them. Standing apart from the remote voting issue, which we put on the Greffe, I think the other ones I do not see any reason why we should not.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Because the proposal in the report is to repeal the 1804 law, which is probably about time it was repealed, and the 1905 law and to recast them in English. But at the moment there is no impetus to do that. The report is simply sat on a shelf. So would it be the Comité that come forward and suggest that that is done?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes, I think we would. I suppose several of us in the Comité are quite traditionalist and do not have a problem reading the French laws, but truthfully I think in fairness to the majority of the public it would probably be better if they were recast. One of the issues with having them in French if there were to be any particular changes, and there have been some changes over the years, they tend to be in English and they are not compatible with each other. So I think Advocate Pallot convinced me that that was the case and I accept that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

I am just trying to get about where it is in terms of priority. Clearly, the Comité have brought forward the dogs law, they have brought forward amendments to the alcohol licensing, and yet the principal pieces of legislation that relate to what happens for their parishioners do not seem to have been progressed or even discussed.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think, given the importance of other matters, it is fair to say it is on the to-do list and it will be for the next Comité after June to consider how to do that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. What are your views, then, on the feedback that some parishioners are unsure what a parish assembly is for and how they can get involved and the like?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, all parishes are very open to discussion with their parishioners and the parish halls are a very good place to do that, should they so wish. It is interesting that those who perhaps have contributed

do not actually ask the parishes. Constables, like all politicians in their particular parishes, are more approachable than anywhere in the United Kingdom. We are all on the end of a phone and it is just a question very often of asking. We try and put as much as we can on the parish websites. We all have parish websites and invite contributions, volunteers, for all sorts. Bear in mind we have a lot of volunteers already. We have not only the Honorary Police, we have roads committees, road assessors, and those positions as they come available are always advertised on the parish websites. Sometimes there is a take-up, sometimes there is not.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Do you think there is a broader role for the parishes to explain the internal workings of the parishes to parishioners, particularly as our community is becoming more diverse?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes, I would not argue against that. I think whatever channels we can use to do that the better. Gone are the days where the only communication you had to do was put an advertisement in the *Evening Post*. Nowadays there are a multitude of media platforms and I think not only in the parishes but also Government it is exploring how those might work best for the various demographics.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. I am going to hand you over to Connétable Honeycombe now, so the disjointed voice. You are on mute, Connétable.

[13:30]

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

That is better. I thought you all heard me. I was asked if I wanted a cup of tea so I was very careful what I actually ... **[Laughter]** I did not want you to hear me eating my biscuits. Afternoon, Mike.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Afternoon.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Do you think the parishes use demographic information when planning or adapting services; for example, looking at the ageing population in providing community support?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think we need to. Different parishes have different ... the methodologies. I know St. Clement has been in the past quite a leader in that. They have certainly strengthened that area and I think we

can learn from them. For my part, I know that we have had volunteer groups dealing with exactly that. I think we could do better. It is a question of getting volunteers to come on board to develop that. We can back it up with the parish administration as best we can, but going back to people volunteering, those are the people we need to help those in, shall we say, the older demographic. It is a question of helping with shopping, perhaps helping with transport to medical appointments and that sort of thing, maybe just help with fixing a lightbulb. I think that is a service that the parishes should provide as best they can.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Do St. Brelade themselves have a community support group? I know St. Clement have it. In St. Ouen we have I think 34 people who are regularly called on to take people to appointments in various parts of the Island. Does St. Brelade have one?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

We did. We have not got anything specific at the moment. It is the parish staff who deal with it at the moment. Notwithstanding that, it is something that I am keen to develop further with volunteers. It is a question of getting the right staff member in the parish hall to administer it because while we can get volunteers to deal with, shall we say, the problems that the older demographic might have, it does need administration. I think it is only fair to say that most parishes should be able to provide that within their administrative structure. But you do need the right person to do it.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Do you think it is something that the Comité could put forward to ... I think there are only a couple of parishes that have a community support group. We could put pressure on the Constables to provide this because it is getting more and more important with an ageing population. We have people on the road every day of the week and, especially with the new hospital at St. Brelade, people without our support group would have to travel to town to get a bus to travel back up to St. Brelade. I just wondered whether it was something that we could put forward at the Comité.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, I would certainly be happy to take that forward on your suggestion. I think it would be well received. We have developed with Government a bus service not only directly to the hospital, talking about the hospital, but from town the 12A runs up directly outside, as does the 10, which is coming across country from St. John. So I think there is enthusiasm to assist those who have transportation difficulties as far as we can. I think you are absolutely right and that is something we can do a lot of work in developing. I would be happy to support that.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Okay. You have highlighted the increased use of online services. How do you think the parishes ensure parishioners who are digitally excluded are not disadvantaged?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, that is a challenge. I think we have to be careful not to put all our eggs into one basket. Those who do not do digital, obviously they have the option to get to the parish hall for an assembly or whatever. That is their route at the moment and I think those are people we do see quite a lot of. Clearly, an in-person assembly is a far better thing than doing it remotely, I think it is fair to say, because you get the exchanges and debate which takes place there. Doing it remotely through some sort of Teams or Zoom channel is never quite the same. I think you lack the ability to have the exchanges which do arise from the floor of the parish assembly.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

That is why I think it is so important with having a parish hall. Daily we probably saw 30, 40, 50 people coming in, and again a lot of elderly with questions, with forms that they cannot complete. The problem is with looking forward with the way technology is going, there are going to be calls before long that the annual return is going to be sent out digitally. We probably have 40 per cent now of our rates forms are sent out digitally and completed and sent back digitally. I think it is so important that we do not get lost by everything going out and people being disadvantaged by not having the ability to have a parish hall where they can come and sort it out.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I would agree. I think it is clear that the direction of travel is towards digital, but you quite rightly say we cannot ignore those who do not and are probably never going to do it. So I can vouch that the counter at our parish hall is always a busy place, as it is I am sure in all parishes.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Yes. So what are your views on parishes working jointly to deliver services such as refuse and recycling?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, of course, some do and I can say that St. Brelade and St. Peter collude in that vein. It does tend to depend on the contractor of the day and what their capacity might be. I believe that St. John are colluding with St. Helier, I think it is, and I think St. Saviour collude with St. Helier in certain areas. So I think there is at the moment ... maybe there is capacity for more of that, but it really depends on the contractor involved. As you know, some parishes do it independently, some contract out. For us the contracting out works best. We have what we think - and I know St. Peter would agree - is an efficient collection service. We do not have any complaints and we are very satisfied

with the contractor, so we would not really want to change from that. It is one of the highest expenses in the parish in terms of parishioners' rates. I think we can do better with regard to recycling and it might be a question of working more closely with Government as to how that can be achieved. We are often compared with the Guernsey situation, which is quite different because they do not have an incinerator or energy-from-waste plant. Everything is exported at significant cost. So we have to look for our own solutions, but I think there needs to be better incentivisation for people to recycle. That is something, with Government, I think we have to work on.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

St. Ouen is one of the parishes that carry out everything in-house and it works for us from the point of view that it means that by the time they have finished the round we have 5 or 6 guys that have then got until 3.00 p.m. to do a lot of other work, which saves us a fortune in potholes, road cleaning, branchage. I am surprised that it is a large capital cost but I still think that it works out cheaper from our point of view because we have that pool of labour once we have finished the actual refuse collection. So I think there is a possibility in the future that some of the parishes should club together because it is certainly cheaper I think if the parishes do it rather than getting a contractor in. Because we are just doing it at cost, where a contractor obviously needs to make money out of it.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes. I would not disagree, as long as you have the parish administration to be able to manage it. It is probably easier in a smaller parish than it would be in a larger one. Speaking of St. Brelade, we have had an independent contractor for an awful long time, certainly 20 years plus, and it has worked for us. I can fully understand what you are saying with regard to flexibility and I think that is the charm, if I can use that word, of the parishes where we can be flexible in terms of road staff, if you like. I would say from my experience some parishes will have a larger road staff than others and the more flexible they can be used for the various issues that arise with the roads, whether it is cleaning, dealing with trees, flooding or what have you, it has to be an advantage. It does depend on the staff of the day, I would say, but I am all for collaborative working if it can be achieved.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Do you think there is any mileage in looking for joint contracts between parishes?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think probably ... the arrangement we have with St. Brelade and St. Peter is not a joint contract, but it is an agreement almost to use the same contractor. It is not to say that should not be developed into a joint contract arrangement, but I think what you suggest merits consideration.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I believe St. Ouen now use ... or subcontract to St. Saviour to do our road cleaning. They do 4 sweeps a year for us. Again, that works out better from our point of view than to purchase a ... one vehicle is £150,000 to £200,000 and it works out from our point of view very good. I think that there is potential for other parishes to do something similar.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Speaking once again for St. Brelade, we have arrangements with I. and E. (Infrastructure and Environment) with their road sweeping team, whereby our manual road sweepers, for want of a better description, sweep the, shall we say, awkward areas of St. Aubin in exchange for I. and E. dealing with some simpler roads where they can pass a road sweeper through. So yes, I think joint working can have its advantages. As you say, these machines do not come cheap.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

What do you think of the perspective on proposals that St. Helier deliver refuse and recycling services across all parishes?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I have a suspicion it would cost more than we are spending at the moment, but there is no reason why that should not be analysed.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Okay. Thanks very much. I just have one comment I could make. It is just regarding a comment you made about quorum, Mike. The specified quorum for both Comité des Connétables and supervisory where you have a quorum, it is 7 members are required for a quorum.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

That could well be the case with the supervisory and I think there are certain elements of the Comité decisions over accounts and expenditure where we do require the full 12, obviously because there will be an implication on all the parishes. So you might be right in terms of the 7 and I do not have that information in front of me.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

If you look, and I am sure will look, at the rulebook on rule SCKP/GCS/EARLEGA-0004 and Rates Law Part 6.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I will believe you.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

We will take your word for it, thank you, Connétable. [Laughter] Thank you. Over to Deputy Curtis.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. So I have a few questions about the traditional parish system and whether modernisation is needed or not. We have just been talking about joint working, but do you have concerns about duplication of parish services and administration, so where it might be better done in one go rather than all the different parishes doing something?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I do not think so. There is quite a lot of collaboration between parishes and parish secretaries. They have a monthly meeting and if there are operational issues that crop up there, they are discussed and I suspect ... well, I can assure you any overlap will be dealt with. I do not think any parish wants to do any more work than they have to and duplication of effort would seem pointless. So I am confident that that is dealt with at secretarial level.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

I was thinking as well about the rates system and whether each parish having to do all the work around rates and all the postal service, everything, is there any way to streamline that better, do you think?

[13:45]

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, I do not know that there is particularly. In fact, if you look at the rate year cycle, the rates demand or the rates assessment or the initial form goes out just before Christmas. They tend to be sent out using people like ProMail, the providers from Jersey Post. That is the most economic way of doing it. They will print and post. So they will go out that way. Of course, the parishes then will deal with those returns as they come back, which they are doing now. Those ones that have not come back will need to be pursued and that takes some work. At this point I will take the advantage of telling people if they have not filled in their return please do so because otherwise it has to be in law followed up by legislation, which means the police getting involved which just adds more effort and cost. But we have to get all those returns in by a certain time so the rate assessors can then start meeting and looking at them and seeing if there are any changes and making adjustments accordingly and then dealing with appeals or questions that may arise.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

That is a lot of work but you do not think it could be streamlined or simplified?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Well, sometimes just that word small is beautiful works quite well in that the rate assessors in the parishes are what I would describe as wise sages in that they ... and I have met them. We have had meetings with all the rate assessors and they have a very balanced view. They understand the system. They know what needs to be done in trying to get some sort of equality across the Island, and they certainly work to that goal. Because properties are all different and there is not a finite way of assessing a property, they use their judgment, which over the years has worked pretty well. If anyone has any concerns, they are happy to listen and deal with it.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Views have been expressed by some contributors who feel that the parish system no longer meets the needs of modern Jersey. So how would you respond to that view?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think there are those who hate administration, they hate being restricted or regulated in any way, and generally speaking the parishes are very light touch in regulation, although they do have different responsibilities for regulation in all different areas. If you do not like the parishes, as is often said, there is a boat in the morning, is there not, to England? I am sure it is often jealous of the way we work over here. Whether you can compare it with the English council system, whether you can compare it with the French mayoral system, there are different legislatures which have different ways of dealing with Government at a lower level, if I can call it that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you think the Connétables are willing to consider change and are open to discussing potential changes where these could lead to improvements for parishioners? Because there is that strong pull of the traditional parish system and to protect that, do you think that means that perhaps Connétables are not willing to think about change sometimes?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

No, I would dispute that. We are all open to change but, of course, with any change there are inevitably consequences. I think before embarking on that change we have to understand fully what those consequences might be. You might argue that the change to bring Senators back in has been a good change or not. It will remain to be seen, but there are consequences. There have been enormous consequences in legislative changes just to deal with what we might think is a small change.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Do you think, though, that there are also consequences in not changing when the world around you is changing?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Yes, indeed, and I do not think any Connétable would be against change, but as I say, having been around for several years, most of us are aware of what the consequences might be.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

So do you think tradition and modernisation can be balanced well in the parish structure as it is?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think so, yes. I have no doubt about that or concerns about that.

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

Okay. Thank you for that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. Just the last couple of questions, really, sort of the magic wand question. If you could make one change to the way the Comité or the parish system operates, what would it be?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

It might be probably collectively looking at H.R. (human resources) issues within the parishes, which can prove difficult. As I said earlier, we have limited resource. We do not have an H.R. department such as the States Employment Board, so each Constable has to deal with the particular H.R. situations on their own head. As you will know, Deputy Miles, we have some 80 staff at Maison St. Brelade, we have some 20-odd in the parish ... I should not say odd, 20 ... **[Laughter]** various numbers in the parish. So there are continually issues to deal with. We could probably look at things being more joint working with regards to property maintenance. A lot of parishes have pooled property which we have to maintain or dispose of, so I think all parishes have to spend quite a lot, shall we say, maintaining by regulation, by law, their parish churches and rectories. This can be quite onerous on the parish and we all try and make an annual provision to cover those costs, but when you come to, how shall we say, putting a new roof on or some major structural repairs, it dents the income.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Do you think the parishes should continue to maintain the parish churches?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

It is a balance of heritage versus religious need and every parish is slightly different. I would speak for St. Brelade in saying that we have what I would describe as a church estate which is really quite valuable from a heritage point of view. So the question is: should the parish walk away from that and let, shall we say, Jersey Heritage pay for it? Other parish churches perhaps have a different position in the parish, but they all are quite prominent and ...

Deputy H.M. Miles:

It is certainly something that Guernsey has now stopped the parishes ... stopped funding the ecclesiastical ...

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

So I gather and it might be a slippery slope to, shall we say, the maintenance of those properties not being continued, which would be very sad.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Looking ahead then to 10, 20 years' time, what do you see as the biggest risk to the sustainability of the parish system if no change is made?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I think a point you made earlier is contribution by parishioners into it is really important, because it is a democratic structure but people have to contribute. So in these days of, as I alluded to before, different media platforms, the question mark is how best to attract people. We do in the Comité exercise our minds as to how best to do that. There is no question about that. We like to be open and receptive. We like to, shall we say, provide the services as we do at the moment in a stable form. My take is that parishioners generally like stability, they do not like change all the time, but that is not to say we should not change for the better and adapt to today's requirements where needed.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you. Is there anything else that you want to tell us?

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

I do not think so. I think the only thing I would say with regard to the parish structure, which I mentioned earlier, they are quite small and it is run on a fairly tight shoestring. In comparison with Government where we have seen this massive growth, we have not grown in the same way. While there might be an expectation sometimes from Government that the parishes should do more and more and more, we are always conscious of the additional costs that might incur and that might indicate an initial resistance. It is not initial resistance because we do not want to do it, it is just we

know what it is going to cost. So I think there has to be an understanding, and perhaps as we see Government numbers diminish, I suspect, in the next few years that might be a bit of a reality check. We are not resistant to being involved, but the Government has to realise we just do not have unlimited resources.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Deputy Curtis, did you have any questions?

Deputy C.D. Curtis:

No, I think that is it.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Connétable Honeycombe online, did you have any further questions?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

Sorry, I did not quite get that.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Have you got any further questions?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

No, I am fine. Thank you very much, Mike, for the contribution that you have put. I think the big thing that I find is that always coming around to election time we have everyone knocking the parishes and trying to centralise things. I think what people forget is there are 12 parishes and they all have their own traditions within those parishes. I think that is what we need to be minded of for the future. I think that we must maintain what we have. I think the major problem is that there is more Government interference, more centralisation. We have the Island-wide rate now which costs us a fortune. We have lost the election. I do not feel that we require any further Government intervention, personally.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Thank you.

Chair, Comité des Connétables:

Can I just comment on Richard's point with regard to elections? He is absolutely right. Prior to the intervention, if I can call it that, by Government we have had interventions by Government, by the C.P.A. (Commonwealth Parliamentary Association), by the electoral authority. Prior to that the parish secretaries ran the elections remarkably efficiently. They were the electoral authority in the

parish. It was usually the senior procureur. So that has all been almost pushed to one side and I do not think there has been a great advantage. I know it was dictated by what the Venice Convention said and I did speak at one point to one of the C.P.A. representatives and the suggestion was: "Well, if you have a system that works, leave it." But we have not left it, we have interfered with it. We have all these levels of, as you say, I suppose, oversight now. Is it helpful? I do not think so. Really, the crux of the matter is we want more people to vote so the more complicated we make it, the less there is going to be. I do not think there is much confidence in the proposed increased turnover this election. We all hope that it will be. I am not sure if it is going to work. But as Richard says, parishes are quite good at running elections and past performance can dictate that, so we will see what happens.

Deputy H.M. Miles:

Okay. Thank you very much for attending today. We appreciate that. On that basis, I am going to close the hearing.

[13:57]